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Interview with James Bernauer

Entrevista a James Bernauer

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Foucault's lectures

Martín Bernales & Agustín Colombo: *When you attended Foucault's lectures in 1979 and 1980¹, you were a doctoral student. Before asking you about the content of these lectures, let us ask why a doctoral student of that time decided to move from the United States to Paris to attend the lectures of this French philosopher. Was it common to find doctoral students like yourself in those lectures? What were you looking for?*

JB: Circumstances and mentors have been decisive in making my life a blessed one. The passing of the years has made me aware of my good fortune in growing up in New York City and attending a Jesuit high school located on the campus of Fordham University. The strict discipline there was a burden but there was an atmosphere that was both intellectual and religious. In my first year as a student, a priest who was a retired musicologist and whose refinement was very appealing to me suggested that I might consider a vocation to the Jesuits. That was not attractive to me at the time, but this notion of "vocation" stayed with me. Was there a particular life to which God would call people? Would He call me? John F. Kennedy was President and he established the Peace Corps and the school surrounded us with tales of the foreign missions, exotic locations that lured us into a certain, often patronizing, perspective. Entering the Jesuit novitiate a few days after my eighteenth birthday, I told friends that they should expect to see me back in two weeks. It was something to try out. That was sixty-two years ago. There were some gifted teachers in my early years in the Jesuits: two laymen stand out: Terence Dewsnap of Bard College who taught my first college course, British and American literature; a year later Roscoe Balch of Marist College opened for me the life of the Roman Empire. And the Jesuit Thomas Bermingham taught us about the ancient Greek culture, the language of which I had already studied for three years in high school. Of course, the young Jesuits who were with me in the novitiate (31 of us in first year) were also my teachers and many of them went on to prominent positions in the Church and in universities. There are too many of them to mention but my closest is a friend to this day. He is very intelligent, did a doctorate in mathematics, and then became an outstanding pastor. Although we young Jesuits lived a separate semi-monastic life away from our "worldly" peers, we were also immersed in the exploding world around us: Vatican Council II with its challenge to update the Church opened in 1962, the Vietnam War was raging, and the anti-war, civil rights, and women's movements were dimensions of the atmosphere. As was the tragedy of assassinations: John Kennedy in 1963, Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy in 1968. There was also a book that stands out for me from that first year of studies: *Christ and Apollo* by the Jesuit William

¹ FOUCAULT, Michel. *Naissance de la biopolitique*. Seuil/Gallimard, Paris, éd. Michel Senellart, 2004; FOUCAULT, Michel. *Du gouvernement des vivants*. Seuil/Gallimard, Paris, éd. Michel Senellart, 2012.

F. Lynch. In Greek class I had been introduced to the Nietzschean distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysiac, but it took a while for me to grasp that Lynch was putting Jesus forward as a Dionysian figure.

The Jesuit Heidegger scholar and psychoanalyst William Richardson² was my most important mentor and he became a model for me on how one might live the Jesuit life with doors open to the secular world. After two years of theological study in New York where I had an important seminar with Avery Dulles, later Cardinal Dulles, I did one year of theology study in Tübingen, Germany and another year in a program of psychology and religion at Union Theological Seminary in New York, I was persuaded by Richardson to stay in the New York area because it was such a center for psychoanalysis. He encouraged me to go to Stony Brook University which was such an extraordinarily creative department during my time there (1975-78). But I could not interest anyone there in my planned dissertation in psychoanalysis and philosophy and so I needed to be open to other possibilities. On a lengthy train ride I read Foucault's *Madness & Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Both its title and content were intriguing and so my choice of dissertation would be on his thought. It also offered me a way to think about historical method because study of the Holocaust was a major interest for me from my high school years and was strengthened by my ordination as a priest in 1975: How should Christianity be thought of after the murder of the European Jews? What role had its traditions played in that crime? Those questions haunted me as I began studying at Stony Brook. My adviser there (Hugh Silverman) recommended that I go to Paris and study with Foucault himself and he dismissed my plea of total ignorance of the French language with the counsel "you will pick it up." And so I left my comfortable studio apartment on Long Island and moved into a community of 60 French speaking Jesuits. It was surprising to me that they expressed such pleasure in my project on Foucault because my assumption was that the Jesuits would not be terribly open to "post-modern" thinking. In time I discovered that many thought I was working on the hermit who lived in the Sahara Desert, Charles de Foucauld. Fortunately, there were others who encouraged me. My stay in Paris was to be an adventure that I am forever grateful for despite its difficulties. My intellectual formation up until then had been shaped by German traditions in philosophy and theology and my year in Tübingen exposed me to some impressive minds: Hans Küng and Heiko Oberman stand out for me. Upon arrival in 1978 in Paris I knew almost nothing about the French intellectual scene. Soon I was attending lectures by Roland Barthes and Claude Levi-Strauss and planned to attend at least one seminar by Lacan, but he cancelled it out of sympathy for a transit workers' strike. I was constantly being told that the person I had to speak with about my work was the

² William Richardson, S.J. was an American philosopher and professor of Philosophy at Boston College Philosophy Department. He wrote on Martin Heidegger and Jacques Lacan. His book *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* is introduced by a preface written by Martin Heidegger.

Jesuit Michel de Certeau, but he left France for the University of California the Summer I arrived in France. I fell in with a welcoming group of South American graduate students and my closest friend became a Spanish Basque psychoanalyst who was doing a Lacanian analysis and a doctorate in psychology. It was heady stuff and I was hooked by French culture and style.

The intellectual milieu that New York, Tübingen and Paris provided was to be continued by my experience at Boston College where I started teaching in the Fall of 1980. Living with the Jesuits at that community were the Canadian philosopher Bernard Lonergan, the German Hans-Georg Gadamer, the German theologian Johann Metz. William Richardson would join this amazing group the year after me. The philosophy department was committed to the so-called continental tradition (a reason for my own hiring there) and during those initial years many prominent thinkers would pass through for a while, among them Jürgen Habermas.³ And then there were several young visiting scholars and a group of remarkable graduate students who wrote their dissertations with me on either Foucault or Hannah Arendt, who was another interest of mine. In the Spring of 1983, I extended an invitation to Foucault to become a visiting professor for a semester at Boston College but he indicated that he would want to visit before making a commitment.

MB&AC: What do you remember of Foucault's lectures in 1979 and 1980? How would you describe the atmosphere that surrounded those lectures? How was he with students and the public in general? Can you tell us more about your experience as a student who attended Foucault's lectures at the College de France?

JB: The first course by Foucault that I attended began in January of 1979, "The Birth of Biopolitics," and it turned out to have little appeal for me. I attended all the classes but worried that I had chosen the wrong dissertation topic. The 1980 lectures were another story! "On the Government of the Living" stunned me with its litany of Christian thinkers, some of whom I had even read. An amusing moment for me came with his mention of the fourth century monk John Cassian which sent a buzz through the hall: "Who is he?" was the question that was quite audible in the room. I had been forced to read large excerpts of Cassian during my Jesuit novitiate and so it seemed to me that Foucault's Cassian must be different from the figure that my pious novice master had bored me with. But they were the same! Early Christian thinkers were of interest to a major secular thinker, I realized.

³ Jürgen Habermas delivered some conferences at Boston College, which later on were published as chapters in his *Philosophical discourse of modernity*.

MB&AC: *After one year of attending Foucault's lectures, you wrote a letter to him with some questions. Why did you wait one year to approach Foucault? What was Foucault's response to your letter? What were those questions that interested Foucault?*

JB: As a result of his own successful interview with Heidegger, Richardson advised me not to approach Foucault himself until I had my own questions to ask. So I sent my letter and lengthy questions to him in mid-February, 1980⁴. He replied at the beginning of March and, after a brief exchange in his office after his next lecture, he invited me to his apartment that evening (March 12, 1980). He could not have been more welcoming and gracious, even tolerating my primitive French with only occasional requests for clarification. Thanks to a Jesuit whom I knew, my letter and list of questions had been put into fine French. During our meeting, he emphasized several points with me: that his current work was still part of his history of sexuality and the notion of flesh was in the context of a relationship of self to self. It was only later that I came to appreciate how important that particular distinction was.

MB&AC: *After meeting Foucault, at the beginning of the 1980s, he asked you to organize a meeting with theologians at the Jesuit residence of Rue de Grenelle in Paris to discuss his work. Can you tell us more about the context and content of that meeting and why Foucault was interested in discussing his work with theologians and priests?*

JB: At the end of our conversation at his appartement, Foucault asked if there was any possibility of privately meeting with some theologians to discuss his work on Christianity. It seemed very odd to me that a professor at the Collège de France would ask a young American graduate student to arrange such a meeting for him. As I came to recognize, his request indicated how distant from one another the religious and secular academic spheres were in France at that time. Foucault's concerns were a challenge to that division and account in part for the ferocious criticisms made of him when he took seriously the religious dimensions of the Iranian revolution of 1978-1979⁵.

Of course, I did arrange such a meeting (May 6, 1980) in the Jesuit residence where I lived at 42 rue de Grenelle and invited six people⁶: Charles Kannengiesser, S.J., a distinguished scholar of the Church Fathers who taught at the Institute Catholique and later at Notre Dame University; Gustave Martelet, S.J., a well-

4 See the attached letter in Annex 1 (pp. 224-227)

5 In the context of a collaboration with the Italian newspaper *Corriere della sera*, Foucault visited Iran a few months before the revolution of 1979 took place. As part of that project, Foucault wrote several articles about the events that eventually led to the Iranian Revolution. Some of these articles are included in: FOUCAULT, Michel. *Dits et écrits*, Paris, Gallimard, "Quarto", éd. Daniel Defert, François Ewald, avec la collaboration de Jacques Lagrange, 2001, volume II (e.g. "Le chah a cent ans de retard", pp. 679-683 ; « À quoi rêvent les Iraniens ? », pp. 688-694).

6 See the attached letter in Annex 2 (pp. 228-232)

known spiritual writer and occasional television commentator whose broad curiosity led him to accompany me to one of Foucault's lectures; Alfonso Alfaro, a student from Mexico, who was writing a dissertation with Michel de Certeau and who occasionally attended Foucault's lectures and who was to become a noted religious historian; Mario Calderón from Colombia who was present at many of the 1980 lectures and who was later murdered with his wife by a group opposed to his social justice work; and William Richardson, S.J. who had recently started a sabbatical in Paris in association with Lacan's psychoanalytic movement. The discussion centered on Foucault's interest in becoming clearer about various categories in Christian sexual teaching. His first question was on the "marital debt" which seemed to confuse the group. Later he asked me to show him the Jesuit library at the Centre Sèvres (now Faculté Loyola Paris) and I brought him into the stacks there and the first category of books was "Dogmatic Theology" and he rushed past it, telling me that that topic was not his interest but rather the next category, which was many library stacks away: "Moral Theology."

Although I do not think that Foucault derived much new knowledge from the discussion with the theologians, he was grateful to me for arranging it and called me on the phone to invite me to lunch with him and his partner Daniel Defert shortly before I returned to the States in May. In the few years after that we met occasionally during my summer visits to Paris and I also attended a month-long course and a seminar that Foucault presented at the University of Toronto that was a summary of his 1981 lectures "Subjectivity and Truth." My last contact with him was an expression of gratitude from him for a text which I sent him in the Spring of 1984, and which impressed him: the early version published in the journal *October* of *The Sexuality of Christ in Renaissance Art and in Modern Oblivion* by Leo Steinberg.

MB&AC: *It is surprising today that an intellectual figure like Foucault could have responded so quickly to a letter from an unknown doctoral student. Do you think that Foucault's interest in keeping a conversation with you was an exceptional moment or does it say something about how he conducted as an intellectual? Is there any insight from these meetings in Paris that is still relevant for you?*

JB: My brief encounters with Foucault were very moving and very significant for me and I have often wondered about his friendliness to me, a very limited young American graduate student. He seemed comfortable with clergy and he had come out of a Catholic milieu and education. He also had dealings in Poitiers with a very intellectually gifted teacher of philosophy, Father Georges Duret and later he was to do his work at the Dominican Library in Paris⁷. He seemed to

⁷ Bibliothèque du Saulchoir located at 43 bis rue de la Glacière. On Duret, see BEHRENT, Michael. *Becoming*

think outside the traditional division between the secular and the religious, an independence that was manifested in such different ways as his recognition of the spiritual accents of the initial Iranian revolt against the Shah and his study of the Church Fathers in his *History of sexuality*. He was also fascinated with a type of liturgical power that was both religious and secular and so he was interested in Pope John Paul II whose charismatic encouragement of the Polish people was so politically effective. He understood the special strength of the Catholic Church in South America when he attended a memorial service for a murdered Jewish journalist attracted thousands to the cathedral and plaza in São Paulo, Brazil. The Cardinal's proclamation of "Shalom, shalom" at the end of the service disarmed the dictatorship. Foucault observed: "And there were all around the square armed police and there were plain clothes policemen in the church. The police pulled back; there was nothing the police could do against that. I have to say, that it had a grandeur of strength, there was a gigantic historical weight there."⁸ Fortunately, there are now several books that deal directly with the topic of Christianity in Foucault's work.⁹

MB&AC: *This year marked the fortieth anniversary of the death of Michel Foucault. The academic events have multiplied. However, perhaps the most personal memory of that death has been obscured. What are your memories of that moment? How do you assess today the actions that many undertook right after his death- i.e., the first conference in Paris and the creation of the Michel Foucault Center, to name two in which you participated - from the perspective of remembering a person or prolonging the force of his flight?*

JB: Report of his death in June 1984 has stayed with me as a shocking memory. A graduate student called me that morning and asked if I had seen that day's newspaper, which I hadn't seen. He told me then of Foucault's passing and that seemed unreal. He was far too young and there was so much of his work to which to look forward. Although there was a publisher that wanted to publish my dissertation in 1981 I kept delaying because I expected his book on Christianity and sexuality¹⁰ to appear any day. As we know, it took many decades before

Foucault: The Poitiers Years (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984)

8 FOUCAULT, Michel. "On Religion" in *Michel Foucault: Religion and Culture*, ed. By Jeremy Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999) 107.

9 In addition to Jeremy Carrette's work cited above, he and prof. Bernauer co-edited a volume of papers: *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004). There are more recent studies such as COLOMBO, Agustin. *Christianisme et subjectivité chez Michel Foucault* (Paris: Hermann Éditeurs, 2023); CHEVALIER, Philippe. *Michel Foucault et le christianisme*, 2nd edition (Paris: ENS Editions, 2024). In addition there is a collection of essays addressed to Foucault's 4th volume in the history of sexuality; FOUCAULT, Michel. *Foucault, les pères, le sexe*, edited by Philippe Büttgen, Philippe Chevalier, Agustin Colombo and Arianna Sforzini (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2021).

10 Professor Bernauer refers to History of sexuality vol. 4, *Confessions of the flesh* published in France in 2018.

Gallimard brought it out posthumously. I have never ceased to be grateful for my exposure to French culture and my meetings with Foucault. But his presence continues to be in his books and the young gifted scholars, of whom I have met many, and who teach Foucault's works bring him back to life. That strikes me as a very spiritual accomplishment. As to how my own scholarly work has been affected, I am unsure. On return from France, I did consider a writing project on confessional practice but that was put aside as perhaps too parochial. I also considered a work on Jesuit schools in France because their minute organization of a student's life was remarkable. It was to be modeled on Foucault's examination of the prison technology and I had gathered some important documents on the theme. Unfortunately, I loaned my one copy of them to a student who disappeared with them, never to be seen again. Perhaps his greatest continuing impact on me was to try to write philosophy and history more like he did. His exciting prose was such a contrast to the dreary philosophical and theological writing and lecturing to which I had become accustomed. It was striking for me that when Foucault had left our meeting in the Jesuit community, several participants chimed in with the observation: "He speaks the language so beautifully." "Even better than Sartre." My poor French would never have picked that up but his tone lives on in his eloquent writings.

Foucault's legacy

MB&AC: *In your article "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion",¹¹ you suggest that Foucault's work on Christianity has for him a personal dimension. A dimension that made him walk along the shores of the religious domain. It seems that in Foucault you found a person who not only was pursuing an academic career but also somebody who was seeking something for him and his life through his studies. If this is true, do you discern any element of Christianity that could have a more personal impact on him?*

JB: I am often asked, more often challenged, about the relevance of Foucault's investigation of Christianity to the core of his work. Often these challenges come from serious readers of Foucault and I recall his companion Daniel Defert once cautioning me with the reminder that Foucault was an atheist. I admired Defert for many intellectual and human gifts but he reflected a worn and widely shared simplistic opposition: one was either an atheist or a believer. But so-called believers might live with deeper doubts than atheists who often embrace a more robust spirituality than many religious believers. But there are other readers who find it difficult or even impossible to understand Foucault's engagement with Christian culture and they

¹¹ See "Michel Foucault's Philosophy of Religion: An Introduction to a Non-Fascist Life" in BERNAUER, James; CARRETTE, Jeremy (eds). *Michel Foucault and Theology: The Politics of Religious Experience* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004)

avoid the demanding investigation of religious texts over which Foucault labored for years. For example: perhaps the single most prominent encyclopedic volume published in English that treats Michel Foucault was released at the end of 2014 by Cambridge University Press as *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon*.¹² Its almost 800 pages contain 91 articles by 72 authors from many different academic faculties. Among the themes treated there are only four brief entries that directly touch theological issues: “Christianity,” “Confession,” “Religion,” and “Spirituality.” I am the author of the first three and Edward McGushin of Stonehill College composed the last. The *Lexicon* has many strengths but it also has real weaknesses. Despite the broad range of themes examined in the *Lexicon*, there is no reference to such important topics as the “pastorate” or “pastoral theology” in general. Of the 25 thinkers who have essays dedicated to them in the volume, not a single figure who appears in *Les aveux de la chair* (*Confessions of the Flesh*) is included. It may be understandable that Foucault’s concern with some lesser-known Christian writers might not be appreciated: one even thinks, for example, of Clement of Alexandria, Cyprien, Gregory of Nyssa or Tertullian. But the *Cambridge Lexicon* has no article even on Augustine or Cassian who had been important in Foucault’s work for many years. Many commentators who write about *Confessions of the Flesh* have ignored the principal themes of the volume. Fortunately the distinguished historian of early Christianity, Peter Brown, paid attention to those themes and appreciates the originality of Foucault’s approach to Christianity. He knew that the “repressive hypothesis” regarding sexuality had been undermined and so Foucault was able to look at Christian practices with fresh eyes. For example: virginity could not be explained in terms of prohibitions and taboos regarding sexual relations. He quotes Foucault: Virginity “involves a substantial valorization of the individual’s relation to their own sexual conduct, since it makes the relation a positive experience which has a historical, metahistorical and spiritual meaning.”¹³ This intimate bonding of spirituality with sexuality is perhaps one of the major sources of contemporary appreciation for Foucault’s examination of Christian thought and practice.

My undergraduate students at Boston College led me to another appreciation. I almost never taught Foucault’s work in my undergraduate classes because it seemed to me that it would be too complex for most of them. My view changed as the result of offering a course on Foucault’s history of madness and discovering that so many were attending it because they themselves or their family members had struggled with mental illness. It was a real revelation for me and the questions and comments by those students made it one of the most interesting of my academic career. It was also comforting for me to see how Foucault’s analyses of categories that he returned to historical development dissolved the stereotypes of

12 Lawlor, Leonard; Nale, John (eds). *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

13 FOUCAULT, Michel, *Confessions of the Flesh*, 154-155. Cited by BROWN, Peter. *Journeys of the Mind: A Life in History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023) 629.

mental illness that shadowed the contemporary views of the students. Isn't that destruction a sign of a living spirituality? As all readers of Foucault know, he is not easy to categorize and one must be cautious in describing him as a "spiritual seeker" but I increasingly regard him that way. How many contemporary philosophers would go to Japan, visit monasteries, study Japanese spiritual practices and search there for an ancient wisdom and an inner peace? Another sign of his thought's spiritual energy is the varied communities of inquiry that developed as a result of his investigations. It has been one of the great satisfactions for me that our Foucault readers come from such different intellectual fields and national backgrounds.

As the years have passed, I have come to appreciate how modest a man Foucault was. That undermined any ideology that might have been fostered on him and so it is not surprising that so many varied communities find him an open partner in dialogue.

MB&AC: Foucault's impact on philosophy, social sciences, history, and humanities in general, contrasts with the effect Foucault has had in theology and religious studies. You were one of the forerunners in working on Foucault and Christianity. One of your first works on this is found in the final chapter of your book "Michel Foucault's Force of Flight. Towards an ethics for thought"¹⁴, entitled ecstatic thinking. Therein you begin the problem of the subject and subjectivity with a section "On Christian experience", which has an interesting presentation on the path that Foucault took in his studies on Christianity. Therein you start underlying that at the beginning his study of Christianity was subordinated to other interests, in particular, the obligation to speak of one's sexuality that led him, under Ivan Illich's suggestion, to study the Christian confession. His later studies, in particular, the governmental crisis that originated with the Reformation and the Counterreformation regarding how everyone should be spiritually directed toward salvation, made Foucault aware of the Christian pastorate. This pastorate needs and incites the ethical formation of the subject. How significant do you think the pastorate was for Foucault to start the exploration of the ethical formation of the subject? How important was the pastorate for Foucault to extend his research beyond the sixteenth century - as he began to do with Omnes et singulatim?

JB: Pastoral power has certainly been an important force but I believe he came to conclude that it was too broad and boring a category to direct interesting research. That was certainly the case with a confession for him. Someone has recently pointed out to me that Foucault wrote a letter that complained he would go mad if he had to read any more confession manuals. It was fortunate for me that I did not know that at the time because I had brought his attention to many of the

¹⁴ See BERNAUER, James. *Michel Foucault's force of flight. Towards an ethic of thought*. New York: Humanity Books, 1990.

manuals that were stored at the Jesuit library at Chantilly outside of Paris. And I don't agree with Foucault on the lack of significance of "confession" as a practice¹⁵. For example, were you born before or after the establishment of communism? Stalin seemed particularly interested in that question and woe to the party member who did not realize that the state of communism had been reached under Stalin. Another example might be the withdrawal of Catholic women's support for confessional practice because of the male supremacy it embodied. I also think that, among other forces, Foucault's reaction led him to a lack of regard for the importance to gay people of their "coming out" as gay. The massive "coming out" of gay men and women in the last fifty years has moved the gay experience from dark bars to an effective political movement. It would be impossible to imagine same sex marriage in Europe and the Americas without that movement.

Foucault's impact on your work

MB&AC: *After two years of attending Foucault's lectures and having met Foucault in person, you moved back to the USA, where you wrote a dissertation on Foucault's archaeology. Later on, you were part of the founding members of the Centre Michel Foucault in Paris, wrote an important book on Foucault, founded the Foucault Circle in the US, have directed dissertations on Foucault at Boston College and some of your students are well-known Foucault's scholars. It does not seem an exaggeration to say that you have been one of the main scholars who have introduced Foucault's thoughts and quests in the USA. All this speaks of the impact Foucault had on you as well. How would you assess today the impact Foucault had on your questions and ways of being a scholar? Playing with the title of your book on Foucault, which elements of Foucault's force of flight are still a source of inspiration and thought for you?*

JB: He confirmed for me the need to think outside the box. Many in the university world presume that the basic structures of knowledge are valid and operate benignly. Foucault laid out a more critical path and it took some time for me to appreciate that his immersion in literature and his own gifts as a writer empowered him to imagine. While a student in Paris, I met with a young German who had done work on *Discipline and Punish*, and he mentioned in our conversation that Foucault would sometimes present dream-like images in his writing. That remark has stayed with me. I had studied with many brilliant philosophers, theologians and historians but none with the imagination of Foucault. In my most recent book I imagined the diary of the Jesuit confessor to Rudolf Höss, the commandant of Auschwitz¹⁶. I would never have done that without Foucault's example.

¹⁵ See BERNAUER, James. Confessions of the soul: Foucault and theological culture. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 31(5-6), 2005, 557-572. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453705055489>

¹⁶ See BERNAUER, James (ed). *Auschwitz and absolution: the case of the commandant and the confessor*. Orbis books, 2023.

It was very fortunate for me that there was not a secondary literature on Foucault when I began careful treatment of his writings. Thus, my focus was on his style of thinking and not how he fit in with structuralism or post-modernity. These were what allowed me to appreciate the range of his mind: Cathartic Thinking, Dissonant Thinking, Dissident Thinking, Ecstatic Thinking¹⁷.

¹⁷ On these categories as ways of conceptualizing Foucault's trajectories, see BERNAUER, James. *Michel Foucault's force of flight. Towards an ethic of thought*. New York: Humanity Books, 1990.

Annex 1: James Bernauer's letter to Michel Foucault. February 15, 1980 / Anexo 1: Carta de James Bernauer a Michel Foucault. 15 de febrero de 1980.

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Annex 2: James Bernauer's letter about the meeting with Michel Foucault. April 28, 1980 / Anexo 2: Carta de James Bernauer sobre el encuentro con Michel Foucault. 28 de abril de 1980.

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Monsieur le Professeur,

Puisque vous avez déjà été très généreux en permettant la publication d'interviews qui m'ont aidé à clarifier votre pensée, j'ai beaucoup hésité à vous demander de me consacrer encore votre temps. J'écris cependant dans le but d'avoir l'occasion, si cela vous est possible, de vous rencontrer personnellement pour m'aider à comprendre votre travail.

Je suis un jésuite américain et depuis plus d'un an j'étudie vos écrits. La première raison qui m'a amené à cette étude est le projet où je vais être engagé durant les prochaines années: une étude du racisme qui cherchera à analyser les rapports entre quelques problèmes scientifiques et politiques et certains discours religieux ou théologiques. Avant d'entreprendre un tel projet, j'avais senti la nécessité d'une approche méthodologique différente à l'égard de ces documents, et c'est alors que j'ai commencé à m'intéresser à votre méthode archéologique et à vos analyses généalogiques. Le temps que j'ai consacré à examiner vos ouvrages s'est avéré très profitable et j'ai l'intention de présenter ce travail dans une thèse cette année à l'Université d'Etat de New York.

Bien que je serais heureux de recevoir des suggestions que vous pourriez faire au sujet de l'approche d'une telle analyse du racisme, j'ai formulé certaines questions qui ont une référence spécifique à mon étude actuelle de vos écrits. Ces questions que je voudrais vous poser, je les ai jointes à cette lettre. Pendant mon séjour à Paris, je suis votre cours et je pense retourner à New York quand il sera terminé.

Je peux imaginer combien de lettres du même genre vous devez recevoir. Permettez-moi de vous remercier d'avance de bien vouloir prendre celle-ci en considération. Au cas où il vous serait impossible de répondre à mon désir de

vous rencontrer personnellement, je profite de l'occasion que m'offre cette lettre pour vous exprimer ma gratitude pour l'expérience si enrichissante au niveau de la pensée que vos écrits ont rendue possible.

Je vous prie d'agréer, Monsieur le Professeur, l'expression de mes sentiments respectueux.

James Bernauer, S.J.

1. Ma première question concerne le travail que vous êtes en train de faire. Vous semblez être parmi ceux, peu nombreux, qui aujourd'hui continuent d'affirmer que certaines pratiques qu'on identifie parfois avec le fascisme — par exemple, le racisme, sous sa forme moderne, étatique biologiste, — ont été décisives dans la formation de notre politique et qu'elles demandent encore une analyse approfondie. Avez-vous été amené à vous intéresser particulièrement à ces pratiques à la suite de vos deux ouvrages "Surveiller et punir" et "La volonté de savoir", qui mettent en lumière un type de pouvoir qui est encore en vigueur dans notre société? Votre travail actuel représente-t-il un changement de centre d'intérêt concernant l'histoire de la sexualité que vous désiriez écrire? Votre préoccupation actuelle concernant la notion de population et la formation d'une "gouvernementalité" politique exprime-t-elle la conviction que ces sujets sont plus fondamentaux pour l'analyse du pouvoir que les questions qu'on aurait aimé voir traitées dans "Le chair et le corps"?

2. Considérant votre option de rester indépendant à l'égard d'une discipline particulière et de la méthode qui la concerne — indépendance qui caractérise vos recherches — je voudrais vous demander pourquoi, pendant plusieurs années, vous avez choisi d'identifier votre travail avec le domaine de l'histoire des idées. Ce choix a-t-il été fait en relation avec votre lecture de Leo Spitzer? Sa critique de Lovejoy, bien que moins développée que votre critique de l'histoire des idées, a certains éléments communs avec votre point de vue.

3. Dans votre conversation de 1967 avec M. Paolo Caruso vous mentionnez un conflit d'intérêts que vous avez expérimenté entre Blanchot et Bataille d'une part et le travail positif de Levi-Strauss d'autre part. Vous affirmez ensuite que le problème religieux formait peut-être le commun dénominateur de deux intérêts. Pourriez-vous dire comment vous avez conçu le problème religieux à ce moment? A-t-il un rapport avec votre analyse dans "La pensée du dehors"? Enfin dans cette même conversation vous avez mentionné que, peut-être, l'humanité commence à découvrir la possibilité de fonctionner sans mythes, et que la religion et la philosophie pourraient disparaître ensemble. Votre compréhension de la fonction de la religion dans la révolution iranienne vous a-t-elle conduit à modifier cette opinion?

4. Le seul point sur lequel la majorité de vos commentateurs tombent d'accord est, sans doute, une série de coupures qu'ils pensent trouver dans votre travail. Cependant, ces mêmes commentateurs semblent être en con-

stant désaccord au sujet de l'endroit de ces coupures. J'ai la vive impression par vos écrits et vos interviews que, tandis qu'il serait inexact de parler de coupures dans le développement de votre pensée, il y a d'importants moments de transition. Je voudrais vous interroger au sujet de deux de ces moments. Pourriez-vous m'éclairer sur les motifs essentiels de votre révision de "Maladie mentale et personnalité"? Comment comprenez-vous la relation entre l'archéologie comme méthode et votre récente utilisation de la généalogie?

5. Bernard-Henri Lévy vous a, un jour, posé cette question: "Desirez-vous quelque chose qui excède le simple devoir éthique de lutter, ici et maintenant, aux côtés de tels ou tels, fous et prisonniers, opprimés et misérables?" Vous lui avez alors répondu: "Je n'ai pas de réponse." A la lumière de la révolution iranienne, donneriez-vous aujourd'hui une réponse différente?

6. Dans ce même entretien avec B.-H. Lévy vous avez mentionné: "Ce qui me gêne souvent aujourd'hui—à la limite, ce qui me fait de la peine—, c'est que tout ce travail fait depuis maintenant une quinzaine d'années, souvent dans la difficulté et parfois dans la solitude, ne fonctionne plus pour certains que comme signe d'appartenance". Je suppose qu'un autre aspect de ce regret pourrait être une certaine satisfaction de voir que votre travail peut fonctionner différemment et qu'en fait il y a réussi. J'aimerais savoir quel rôle positif a joué, selon vous, votre travail dans la "bataille pour l'histoire" dont vous avez parlé ailleurs.

April 28, 1980

Please excuse the recourse to my langue maternelle in the interests of saving time. The discussion with Professor Foucault will take place mardi, 6 mai à 18^h00. Pat Samway has kindly provided his large and pleasant room (Ch. 443) as our meeting place. I have invited the following participants:

M. Alfonso Alfaro (un étudiant laïc du Mexique who had worked with Roland Barthes and who is now writing a dissertation under the direction of Michel de Certeau; he has followed much of Foucault's course)

Le Père Mario Calderon, S.J. (un étudiant de Colombie who lives at Action Populaire and who has attended many of Foucault's lectures this year)

Le Père Charles Kannengiesser, S.J.

Le Père Gustave Martelet, S.J.

Le Père William Richardson, S.J.

The idea for this discussion originated with Professor Foucault and I wish to express my deep gratitude to each of you for your willingness to participate.

During the ten years that Professor Foucault has taught at the Collège de France, his "theatre" as he once called it, those who have followed his performances might have thought themselves relatively familiar with his cast of characters and range of themes. Philosophers and scientists, medical doctors and psychiatrists, those searching for truth and those inflicted with the passion for power played out their roles in his studies of the creation of modern forms of knowledge and of the institutional practices which accompany them. For many in his audience, the lectures Foucault presented this year, from January through March, must have seemed as though they had been written by someone else. Certainly the cast was new: Philon d'Alexandrie, Hermas, Justin, Tertullien, Hippolyte, Cyprien, Origene, Jerome, Cassien. These are not the figures with whom Foucault has been identified. The questions that preoccupied him seemed equally foreign to his earlier archaeological studies of the human sciences. Christian thought and praxis were continually introduced into his course and his interrogation of them reflects his current concern with theology in general and pastoral theology in particular. What is the meaning of saying that Christianity is a religion of perfection? What is the relation of the believer's search for truth and his quest for salvation, his commitment to perfection and his hope for redemption? In contrast to the paganism that preceded the Christian dispensation, how are we to understand the uniqueness of its notion of faith, its concept of law, its sense of sin, its practices of examination of conscience, of spiritual direction, of confession, of penance? What are the procedures that Christianity specifically introduced to bring men to self-consciousness and knowledge of the truth? What are its understandings of metanoia, of the rupture between man and truth, of the body as flesh(chair)? What transpires in the verbalization of sin, in the governance of souls through spiritual direction? What relations exist between Christian practice and the concepts of reason and subjectivity that appear in modernity? These questions are related to Foucault's past thinking and, without wishing to give any impression as to the specific concerns that he wants to raise in the discussion, it might be of use if I briefly indicated a few of the elements

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that, in my view, have formed the perspective within which Foucault is examining Christian texts and practices.

An abiding concern for Foucault has been the figure of man himself and those philosophies and institutions that proclaim themselves as humanistic. For twenty years he has been investigating the forms of knowledge and the exercises of power that are responsible for the constitution and functioning of that specific anthropology that has operated in modern thought. Whether it was the study of the rationality operating in modern psychology and medicine (Histoire de la folie à l'âge classique, Maladie mentale et psychologie, Naissance de la clinique) or in the human sciences in general (Les mots et les choses, Surveiller et punir, Histoire de la sexualité I: La volonté de savoir), Foucault's archaeological thinking has aimed to show the fashioning and functioning of this man of modern humanism who is the product of such diverse knowledges and practices that our comprehension of him will always be fragmentary. For Foucault one thing has been certain: "on peut être sûr que l'homme y est une invention récente;" "l'homme n'est pas le plus vieux problème ni le plus constant qui se soit posé au savoir humain." Although his definition of this modern man varies in relation to the particular problematic of a specific study, his claim that man is a recent invention asserts that the epistemologically central role for man's consciousness, as, for example, can be seen in Descartes' cogito or Kant's transcendental subjectivity, appears only in the modern period. It is then that man is conceived of as "un étrange doublet empirico-transcendental, puisque c'est un être tel qu'on prendra en lui connaissance de ce qui rend possible toute connaissance."

One of the most arresting features of this figure man for Foucault is how he is a personage who finds so much of his identity located in a network of subjugations, whether he be characterized as possessing the power of reason, as the bearer of rights or as a temporal freedom. As reason man was constructed as an object for a knowledge which confined to the sphere of unreality major dimensions of human being and which pronounced his intelligence subject to a force called the truth; accorded rights, he was locked within social

laws and exposed to the "will" of the people; identified as temporal, he was inserted into great patterns of destiny.

The fabrication of man as focus in modern thought is as dependent upon the operation of particular forms of power and discipline as it is upon types of knowledge. Rather than conceiving of power as essentially repressive, however, Foucault considers it positive and productive. The specific form of power that interests him at the present is "government", that is, how the art of governing men is articulated as a discipline and the relations of this discipline to knowledge that is contemporary with it. The title of this year's course--"Du gouvernement des vivants"--indicated that he would continue his investigation of the art of government, both as a practice and a knowledge, with emphasis upon the conditions of possibility that account for the constitution of human beings as groups requiring particular forms of governing.

Pastoral theology intersects with these persistent themes in Foucault's thought, especially as they were formulated in the introductory volume of his still continuing Histoire de la sexualité. Thus far, his study of Christian penance and confession suggests continuities and discontinuities with the forms of knowledge and power that became prominent in modernity. On one hand, there is perhaps to be found in the practice of confession the roots of that obligation which so attracted Foucault's attention in his investigation of sexuality: the obligation to transform desire into discourse: "la tâche, quasi infinie, de dire, de se dire à soi-même et de dire à un autre, aussi souvent que possible, tout ce qui peut concerner le jeu des plaisirs, sensations et pensées innombrables qui, à travers l'âme et le corps, ont quelque affinité avec le sexe. Ce projet d'une 'mise en discours' du sexe, il s'était formé, il y a bien longtemps, dans une tradition ascétique et monastique. Le XVII^e siècle en a fait une règle pour tous." In addition, there is perhaps to be discerned in Christian practices of penance and spiritual direction a type of power--pouvoir pastoral--which is crucial for understanding the form of power and the practice of

governing that came to be developed and exercised in modern society:

C'est en Orient que le thème du pouvoir pastoral a pris son ampleur--et surtout dans la société hébraïque. Un certain nombre de traits marquent ce thème: le pouvoir du berger s'exerce moins sur un territoire fixe que sur une multitude en déplacement vers un but; il a pour rôle de fournir au troupeau sa subsistance, de veiller quotidiennement sur lui et d'assurer son salut; enfin il s'agit d'un pouvoir qui individualise en accordant, par un paradoxe essentiel, autant de prix à une seule des brebis qu'au troupeau tout entier. C'est ce type de pouvoir qui a été introduit en Occident par le Christianisme et qui a pris une forme institutionnelle dans le pastorat ecclésiastique: le gouvernement des âmes se constitue dans l'Eglise chrétienne comme une activité centrale et savante, indispensable au salut de tous et de chacun.

I believe that Foucault is extremely tentative in his understanding of Christian theology and practice and, thus, he requested the opportunity for this meeting. These few paragraphs are mere indications of a series of issues in his thought that have led him to a reading of the Church Fathers and to an examination of the formation of Christian pastoral practice.